

BIRTH CONTROL

The ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity.

—Elder Dallin H. Oaks

SELECTED TEACHINGS

The Family: A Proclamation to the World

“We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

First Presidency—Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark Jr., David O. McKay

“By virtue of the authority in us vested as the First Presidency of the Church, we warn our people. . . .

“Amongst His earliest commands to Adam and Eve, the Lord said: ‘Multiply and replenish the earth.’ He has repeated that command in our day. He has again revealed in this, the last dispensation, the principle of the eternity of the marriage covenant. . . .

“The Lord has told us that it is the duty of every husband and wife to obey the command given to Adam to multiply and replenish the earth, so that the legions of choice spirits waiting for their tabernacles of flesh may come here and move forward under God’s great design to become perfect souls, for without these fleshly tabernacles they cannot progress to their God-planned destiny. Thus, every husband and wife should become a father and a mother in Israel to children born under the holy, eternal covenant” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1942, 11–12).

First Presidency—David O. McKay, Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner

“We seriously regret that there should exist a sentiment or feeling among any members of the Church to curtail the birth of their children. We have been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth that we may have joy and rejoicing in our posterity.

“Where husband and wife enjoy health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity, it is contrary to the teachings

of the Church artificially to curtail or prevent the birth of children. . . .

“However, we feel that men must be considerate of their wives who bear the greater responsibility not only of bearing children, but of caring for them through childhood. To this end the mother’s health and strength should be conserved and the husband’s consideration for his wife is his first duty, and self-control a dominant factor in all their relationships” (letter to stake presidents, bishops, and mission presidents, 14 Apr. 1969).

President Joseph F. Smith

“Motherhood lies at the foundation of happiness in the home, and of prosperity in the nation. God has laid upon men and women very sacred obligations with respect to motherhood, and they are obligations that cannot be disregarded without invoking divine displeasure. In 1 Timothy 2:13–15, we are told that ‘Adam was first formed, then Eve. . . .’ Can she be saved without child-bearing? She indeed takes an awful risk if she wilfully disregards what is a pronounced requirement of God” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 288–89).

President David O. McKay

“Love realizes his sweetest happiness and his most divine consummation in the home where the coming of children is not restricted, where they are made most welcome, and where the duties of parenthood are accepted as a co-partnership with the eternal Creator.

“In all this, however, the mother’s health should be guarded. In the realm of wifehood, the woman should reign supreme” (*Gospel Ideals*, 469).

President Joseph Fielding Smith

“The family is the most important organization in time or in eternity. Our purpose in life is to create for ourselves eternal family units. There is nothing that will ever come into your family life that is as important as the sealing blessings of the temple and then keeping the covenants made in connection with this order of celestial marriage” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1972, 13; or *Ensign*, July 1972, 27).

“The covenant given to Adam to multiply was renewed after the flood with Noah and his children after him. The Lord said to Noah: ‘And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein. And God spake unto

Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.' [Gen. 9:7–9.]

"This covenant is still binding, although mankind has departed from the way of eternal life and has rejected the covenant of marriage which the Lord revealed.

"Birth Control Is Wickedness. The abuse of this holy covenant has been the primary cause for the downfall of nations. When the sacred vows of marriage are broken and the real purpose of marriage abused, as we find it so prevalent in the world today, then destruction is inevitable.

"No nation can endure for any length of time, if the marriage covenants are abused and treated with contempt. The anger of the Almighty was kindled against ancient nations for their immorality. There is nothing that should be held in greater sacredness than this covenant by which the spirits of men are clothed with mortal tabernacles" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:86–87).

President Spencer W. Kimball

"Tomorrow when I repeat the phrases that will bind you for eternity, I shall say the same impressive words that the Lord said to that handsome youth and his lovely bride in the Garden of Eden: 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.' . . .

". . . You came to get for yourself a mortal body that could become perfected, immortalized, and you understood that you were to act in partnership with God in providing bodies for other spirits. . . . And so you will not postpone parenthood. There will be rationalists who will name to you numerous reasons for postponement. Of course, it will be harder to get your college degrees or your financial start with a family, but strength like yours will be undaunted in the face of difficult obstacles. Have your family as the Lord intended. Of course it is expensive, but you will find a way, and besides, it is often those children who grow up with responsibility and hardships who carry on the world's work" ("John and Mary, Beginning Life Together," *New Era*, June 1975, 8).

"After marriage young wives should be occupied in bearing and rearing children. I know of no scriptures or authorities which authorize young wives to delay their families or to go to work to put their husbands through college. Young married couples can make their way and reach their educational heights, if

they are determined" ("The Marriage Decision," *Ensign*, Feb. 1975, 4).

"Supreme happiness in marriage is governed considerably by a primary factor—that of the bearing and rearing of children. Too many young people set their minds, determining they will not marry or have children until they are more secure, until the military service period is over; until the college degree is secured; until the occupation is more well-defined; until the debts are paid; or until it is more convenient. They have forgotten that the first commandment is to 'be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.' (Genesis 1:28.) And so brides continue their employment and husbands encourage it, and contraceptives are used to prevent conception. Relatives and friends and even mothers sometimes encourage birth control for their young newlyweds. But the excuses are many, mostly weak. The wife is not robust; the family budget will not feed extra mouths; or the expense of the doctor, hospital, and other incidentals is too great; it will disturb social life; it would prevent two salaries; and so abnormal living prevents the birth of children. The Church cannot approve nor condone the measures which so greatly limit the family" (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 328–29).

President Howard W. Hunter

"Honor your wife's unique and divinely appointed role as a mother in Israel and her special capacity to bear and nurture children. We are under divine commandment to multiply and replenish the earth and to bring up our children and grandchildren in light and truth (see Moses 2:28; D&C 93:40). You share, as a loving partner, the care of the children. Help her to manage and keep up your home. Help teach, train, and discipline your children" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 67; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 50).

President Gordon B. Hinckley

"I am offended by the sophistry that the only lot of the Latter-day Saint woman is to be barefoot and pregnant. It's a clever phrase, but it's false. Of course we believe in children. The Lord has told us to multiply and replenish the earth that we might have joy in our posterity, and there is no greater joy than the joy that comes of happy children in good families. But he did not designate the number, nor has the

Church. That is a sacred matter left to the couple and the Lord. The official statement of the Church includes this language: ‘Husbands must be considerate of their wives, who have the greater responsibility not only of bearing children but of caring for them through childhood, and should help them conserve their health and strength. Married couples should exercise self-control in all of their relationships. They should seek inspiration from the Lord in meeting their marital challenges and rearing their children according to the teachings of the gospel’ (*General Handbook of Instructions* [1983], p. 77)” (*Cornerstones of a Happy Home*, 6).

Elder Melvin J. Ballard

“There is a passage in our Scriptures which the Latter-day Saints accept as divine: ‘This is the glory of God—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’ [see Moses 1:39]. Likewise we could say that this is the glory of men and women—to bring to pass the mortality of the sons and daughters of God, to give earth-life to the waiting children of our Father. . . . The greatest mission of woman is to give life, earth-life, through honorable marriage, to the waiting spirits, our Father’s spirit children who anxiously desire to come to dwell here in this mortal state. All the honor and glory that can come to men or women by the development of their talents, the homage and the praise they may receive from an applauding world, worshipping at their shrine of genius, is but a dim thing whose luster shall fade in comparison to the high honor, the eternal glory, the ever-enduring happiness that shall come to the woman who fulfils the first great duty and mission that devolves upon her to become the mother of the sons and daughters of God” (Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard*, 203–4).

Elder Ezra Taft Benson

“The world teaches birth control. Tragically, many of our sisters subscribe to its pills and practices when they could easily provide earthly tabernacles for more of our Father’s children. We know that every spirit assigned to this earth will come, whether through us or someone else. There are couples in the Church who think they are getting along just fine with their limited families but who will someday suffer the pains of remorse when they meet the spirits

that might have been part of their posterity. The first commandment given to man was to multiply and replenish the earth with children. That commandment has never been altered, modified, or cancelled. The Lord did not say to multiply and replenish the earth if it is convenient, or if you are wealthy, or after you have gotten your schooling, or when there is peace on earth, or until you have four children. The Bible says, ‘Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them. . . .’ (Ps. 127:3, 5.) We believe God is glorified by having numerous children and a program of perfection for them. So also will God glorify that husband and wife who have a large posterity and who have tried to raise them up in righteousness” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 12).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

“To the first man and woman on earth, the Lord said, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply’ (Moses 2:28; Genesis 1:28; see also Abraham 4:28). This commandment was first in sequence and first in importance. It was essential that God’s spirit children have mortal birth and an opportunity to progress toward eternal life. Consequently, all things related to procreation are prime targets for the adversary’s efforts to thwart the plan of God. . . .

“Knowledge of the great plan of happiness also gives Latter-day Saints a distinctive attitude toward the bearing and nurturing of children.

“In some times and places, children have been regarded as no more than laborers in a family economic enterprise or as insurers of support for their parents. Though repelled by these repressions, some persons in our day have no compunctions against similar attitudes that subordinate the welfare of a spirit child of God to the comfort or convenience of parents.

“The Savior taught that we should not lay up treasures on earth but should lay up treasures in heaven (see Matthew 6:19–21). In light of the ultimate purpose of the great plan of happiness, I believe that the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 97, 100–101; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 72, 75).

I HAVE A QUESTION

Dr. Homer Ellsworth

Ensign, Aug. 1979, 23–24

Is it our understanding that we are to propagate children as long and as frequently as the human body will permit? Is there not any kind of “gospel family-planning,” for lack of a better way to say it?

I hear this type of question frequently from active and committed Latter-day Saint women who often ask questions that are outside my professional responsibilities. Here are some of the principles and attitudes I believe apply to this fundamental question, a question most couples ask themselves many times during their child-bearing years.

I rejoice in our basic understanding of the plan of salvation, which teaches us that we come to earth for growth and maturity, and for testing. In that process we may marry and provide temporal bodies for our Heavenly Father’s spirit children. That’s basic, it seems to me. In contemplating this truth, I also take great delight in the Church’s affirmative position that it is our blessing and joy, and our spiritual obligation, to bear children and to have a family. It impresses me that the positive is stressed as our goal.

I rejoice in our understanding that one of the most fundamental principles in the plan of salvation is free agency. The opportunity to make free agency choices is so important that our Heavenly Father was willing to withhold additional opportunities from a third of his children rather than deprive them of their right of choice. This principle of free agency is vital to the success of our probation. Many of the decisions we make involve the application of principles where precise yes-and-no answers are just not available in Church handbooks, meetings, or even the scriptures.

Our growth process, then, results from weighing the alternatives, studying the matter carefully, and seeking inspiration from the Lord. This, it seems to me, is at the heart of the gospel plan. It has always given me great joy and confidence to observe that in their administration of God’s teachings, our inspired prophets do not seek to violate this general plan of individual agency, but operate within broad guidelines that provide considerable individual flexibility.

I recall a President of the Church, now deceased, who visited his daughter in the hospital following a miscarriage.

She was the mother of eight children and was in her early forties. She asked, “Father, may I quit now?” His response was, “Don’t ask me. That decision is between you, your husband, and your Father in Heaven. If you two can face him with a good conscience and can say you have done the best you could, that you have really tried, then you may quit. But, that is between you and him. I have enough problems of my own to talk over with him when we meet!” So it is clear to me that the decisions regarding our children, when to have them, their number, and all related matters and questions can only be made after real discussion between the marriage partners and after prayer.

In this process of learning what is right for you at any particular time, I have always found it helpful to use a basic measuring stick: *Is it selfish?* I have concluded that most of our sins are really sins of selfishness. If you don’t pay your tithing, selfishness is at the heart of it. If you commit adultery, selfishness is at the heart of it. If you are dishonest, selfishness is at the heart of it. I have noted that many times in the scriptures we observe the Lord chastising people because of their selfishness.

Thus, on the family questions, if we limit our families because we are self-centered or materialistic, we will surely develop a character based on selfishness. As the scriptures make clear, that is not a description of a celestial character. I have found that we really have to analyze ourselves to discover our motives. Sometimes superficial motivations and excuses show up when we do that.

But, on the other hand, we need not be afraid of studying the question from important angles—the physical or mental health of the mother and father, the parents’ capacity to provide basic necessities, and so on. If for certain personal reasons a couple prayerfully decides that having another child immediately is unwise, the method of spacing children—discounting possible medical or physical effects—makes little difference. Abstinence, of course, is also a form of contraception, and like any other method it has side effects, some of which are harmful to the marriage relationship.

As a physician I am often required to treat social-emotional symptoms related to various aspects of living. In doing so I have always been impressed that our prophets past and present have never stipulated

that bearing children was the sole function of the marriage relationship. Prophets have taught that physical intimacy is a strong force in strengthening the love bond in marriage, enhancing and reinforcing marital unity. Indeed, it is the rightful gift of God to the married. As the Apostle Paul says,

“The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.” Paul continues, “Depart ye not one from the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” (1 Cor. 7:4–5, Joseph Smith Translation). Abstinence in marriage, Paul says, can cause unnecessary temptations and tensions, which are certainly harmful side effects.

So, as to the number and spacing of children, and other related questions on this subject, such decisions are to be made by husband and wife righteously and empathetically communicating together and seeking the inspiration of the Lord. I believe that the prophets have given wise counsel when they advise couples to be considerate and plan carefully so that the mother’s health will not be impaired. When this recommendation of the First Presidency is ignored or unknown or misinterpreted, heartache can result.

I know a couple who had seven children. The wife, who was afflicted with high blood pressure, had been advised by her physician that additional pregnancy was fraught with grave danger and should not be attempted. But the couple interpreted the teachings of their local priesthood leaders to mean that they should consider no contraceptive measures under any circumstances. She died from a stroke during the delivery of her eighth child.

As I meet other people and learn of their circumstances, I am continually inspired by the counsel of the First Presidency in the *General Handbook of Instructions* that the health of the mother and the well-being of the family should be considered. Thirty-four years as a practicing gynecologist and as an observer of Latter-day Saint families have taught me that not only the physical well-being but the emotional well-being must also be considered. Some parents are less subject to mood swings and depression and can more easily cope with the pressures of many children. Some parents have more help from their families and friends. Some are more effective parents than others, even when their desire and motivation are the same. In addition, parents do owe their children the necessities of life. The desire for luxuries, of course, would not be an appropriate determinant of family size; luxuries are just not a legitimate consideration. I think every inspired human heart can quickly determine what is luxury and what is not.

In summary, it is clear to me that couples should not let the things that matter most be at the mercy of those that matter least. In searching for what is most important, I believe that we are accountable not only for what we do but for why we do it. Thus, regarding family size, spacing of children, and attendant questions, we should desire to multiply and replenish the earth as the Lord commands us. In that process, Heavenly Father intends that we use the free agency he has given in charting a wise course for ourselves and our families. We gain the wisdom to chart that wise course through study, prayer, and listening to the still small voice within us.